

# The Miracle and Mystery of God and His Grace

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, we confess before you that often we aren't honest with you in our prayers. And Father, we confess that for many of us, when John was reading Romans 11, we were bored.

And we didn't think it was very interesting. And Father, we confess that to you. We confess that sometimes that's how your word strikes us. Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would gently but deeply and powerfully move in our lives.

Father, help us to get over ourselves. Help us, Father, to have hearts and minds and wills that are hungry for your word, that are willing to pursue and just sit and think about your word.

Father, help us. May your Holy Spirit so move and work within us that we might understand that you are wise, that you speak what we need to know, and that most of all, not only most of all, Father, but not only are you wise, but you are good.

And you sent your Son to be our Savior. Father, draw us to yourself. And this we ask in Jesus' name, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So, here's the problem with the Romans 11 text.

[ 1 : 13 ] There's several problems. The first problem is that probably a lot of us, maybe, you know, maybe I'm just far more wicked than everybody here, but, you know, for a lot of us that text seemed to go on and on and on.

Talked about olive trees and shoots and Israel, and you're thinking to yourself, when you think about it at all, what on earth is going on with this text? Before I became a Christian, my problem in becoming a Christian wasn't tempted towards atheism or something like that.

Nicky Gumbel expressed it very well. I found Christianity boring and irrelevant. And if you're a non-Christian here this morning, you might think Romans 11 is a test case in a text which is boring and irrelevant.

But it actually, it's very, very interesting. It's a difficult text. It's a funny text. And it's a text which doesn't sort of immediately scream out, immediately scream out to us postmodern Canadians in Ottawa in 2016.

But actually, if you caught two of the big, bolder, elephant-in-the-room questions in the text, you'd realize that it's actually touching upon something that is very deeply relevant.

[ 2 : 25 ] I don't know if you heard it. It was in verse 1 and verse 11. There's these two big, bolder questions, like a big rock, big elephant-in-the-room question. The first question is verse 1.

I ask then, has God rejected his people? Does God reject people? And then the second one is in verse 11. So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall?

And this is this idea that somehow people stumble. And the idea of fall is a very, very good word. In the original language, the idea is that you fall and you keep falling and you keep falling and you keep falling and you keep falling and there's no turnaround.

Like it's a falling that leaves you completely crushed. Those are actually very profound spiritual questions. And whether we think about it very much.

You know, I know several people. In fact, there's probably people here in this congregation. It might be too painful for you to share it over coffee. But I know that there are people in this church who haven't spoken to their parents in years.

[ 3 : 28 ] Parents are still alive. They have phones, internet, all that. But they haven't spoken to their parents in years. I know of several people who've lived in the home with their parents.

And in both the two cases that immediately come to my mind, they were both young women. And in each case, they would live in the house with their father for years. And for at least two or three years, not say a single word to their father while living in the same house with them.

And just to make it a little bit even more personal, you might notice that I don't refer to my parents very often. I, in fact, have only talked to my parents, I think, twice in seven years. Now, you know, in all of these cases, if you got into it, there's, you know, there's different things. And maybe in some cases, it's because parents have done profound things of abuse and have been unrepentant.

And it's hard to talk to people who've abused you and been unrepentant. And for others, maybe it's a type of a hardness and an arrogance in heart.

[ 4 : 29 ] The parents might not or the other person might not or it's a friend that you've cut off. And it might be that there's a bit of an arrogance and a hardness in you. But in fact, it's a very common human experience.

And so the question, whether we're consciously aware of this or not, is, is God like this? Is God like this?

Does God come to a point with human beings, or not just human beings in general, but maybe human beings in general, but particular people where that's it, sick and tired of this, not talking, not having anything to do with them ever again, ever, ever, ever again?

Happens to human beings? Is God like that? Now, when you realize that that's actually the question that the text is addressing, you realize that, whoa, one moment, okay, they might seem to answer it in an odd way that doesn't just sort of jump out at me with, like, you know, flashing lights.

But it's actually a pretty good question. So it's really helpful if you have Bibles, if you open them to Romans 11. And we're going to begin, in fact, we're going to, Andrew, if you could put up the first, the Romans 11 text.

[ 5 : 39 ] You can find your Romans 11 in your Bible. But there's going to be a couple of times, I'm going to sort of cheat. I'm not saying this to stop us from talking. I'm not saying, okay, now you see 33 or 36. There's nothing else we have to talk about.

You know, get, you know, repent and just, you know, shut up and, you know, get on with God. But this is how everything is going to come to an end. And if, in fact, part of the fundamental question before us, an existential question, is, is God like this?

It's just really important to see where the whole argument of Romans 1 to 11 is going to come to rest. And if you get nothing else out of this service, we're going to read this verse together about four or five or six times.

If you get nothing else out of the service but getting this a little tiny bit in your head, then this is really good. So let's, let's, could you say this with me out loud? Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?

[ 6 : 41 ] Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.

Amen. So I'm not saying that just so we can say, okay, George, that's the end of the question. We don't have to discuss it. No, no, no, no, no. You know, the details are important. But it's, it's, it's a good bit of a pause here just to take a minute to think about how different God is.

And we're going to see that we haven't even begun to really understand how different God is until we look into this text. How counterintuitive God often acts towards us because he's wiser than us. So, so let's look at the beginning of chapter 11, verse 1. And it goes like this. I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means.

For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. Now just pause here for a second. And if you're guests here this morning, you'll notice, actually all of you, even if you come here pretty well, you know, it's Romans chapter 11.

[ 7 : 48 ] And, and the way the book, you know, Paul didn't just sit down and write a whole pile of quotes. If you, you know, I'm turning my Bible here, like he began writing over here and then he wrote and then he wrote and then he wrote and then he wrote and then he wrote and then he wrote and then he comes to chapter 11.

So it's obviously sort of a bit of a flow. And, and part of the flow of it is that he's been really trying to talk about how God does everything, that, that God works so that we come to the point where we recognize that unless God does something for us, we're really stuck.

Occasionally I let bad words slip just by accident because it's how I talk when I'm not up in the, in church. And then Andrew will say something.

And I think the last time I let something slip, he deleted it. So there's no internet record. But I almost said something there, which maybe wouldn't be completely polite. But, you know, so anyway, so he goes through the fact that, you know, Paul is trying to argue that unless we come to this point where we realize unless God does something, we're really stuck because we're helpless.

And then he talks about how Jesus and what Jesus does on the cross. And he gives the first few things in chapter four and five primarily about the things that Jesus takes away from us so we can be made right with God.

[ 9 : 03 ] And then chapter six, the things that Jesus gives us so that we're made right with God. And then in chapter seven, he, he, he acknowledges the fact that human beings are divided and have contradictory selves and that we're sort of all messed up and confused.

And then in Romans eight, he's sort of coming to a bit of a crescendo and, and he says, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And then he, he goes on and he has this ringing thing.

In fact, I'll just read it to you right now. It says ringing, ringing thing at the end of Romans chapter eight. He says, um, uh, where does it start here? What shall we say? Verse 31. What shall we say then to those, to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God select those whom God has called and made right with himself?

It is God who justifies who is to condemn. Who's going to condemn us? Christ Jesus. No, he is the one who died more than that. Who was raised? Who is at the right hand of God?

[ 10 : 05 ] Who is indeed interceding for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written.

Then he quotes from the Bible to show that God knows that even after we have become his children, bad things will still happen to us. For your sake, we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

No. And in Greek, it would be like bolded, emphatic. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen. And God's God people say amen. Exactly right. But in the way that the Romans is written, Paul knows that there's going to be some skeptic in the congregation.

There always is. Actually, often it's me, but that's a separate story. Who puts up their little hand and says, that all sounds really nice, but what about the Jews?

[ 11 : 15 ] Like, what about all that Old Testament stuff we've been reading every week? And that doesn't seem to have worked out very well for them, does it? And so in chapter 9 and 10, he's really dealing with this question.

Like, before Jesus, does God, in fact, keep his word? And in chapter 9 and 10, and so it comes now, here we are in verse 11, as part of Paul's long answering of this question, is Romans 8 actually true?

And so now he comes to this point, this existential point, where we have to wonder, because it's just part of our very, very nature. Even when we deny God, often what we're doing is we're denying God who is a version of ourselves.

And even when we believe in God, often we're not really believing in the God who is there, we're believing in a God who is a version of ourselves. I mean, it's a deeply seated human problem.

It's a human problem for Christians as well. And so in chapter 11, verse 1, he asks, has God rejected his people? Is God like the young woman who lives in a house with her father for three years, and even though the father will attempt conversation, she will act like he is the table or the chair, and who talks to tables and chairs, or listens to them?

[ 12 : 34 ] As a side, if you think your table's talking to you, and you're listening, you need help. You need help. We don't talk to tables or listen to them.

So is God like that? Has he rejected us so totally? Absolutely. And, you know, some of us might say, oh yeah, you know, we've been over that. But, you know, the Baptist church I grew up in, and

I'm not picking on Baptist churches, you know, it would often happen that a couple, their marriage would quietly come to an end.

And even though it was a church that preached grace, the fact of the matter is, is that for many Christians, it's their spiritual and emotional performance that makes them think they're right with God.

And so their marriage would come to an end, and both the husband and the wife would stop attending the church. Because their performance hasn't matched the standards of the church, and there's a feeling that God has rejected them.

And therefore, they don't belong with other, those Christians. It's a deep question. So see how he answers it. It's going to be a little bit in odd language, because you see, the way we work in our culture, we'd want to try to, I'd maybe want to say, well, let's look at Bob.

[13:51] Here's Bob's life. Or let's look at Sally, and this is their life. But no, no. He actually, he goes back to the Bible, because he realizes that, you know, human experiences, it can be hard to know what goes on in human lives.

So let's see God's actual written record of how he deals with Israel. And so here it is. I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means. No.

No. Absolutely not. So he's going to basically give two reasons why God hasn't rejected his people. First, he's going to say, I'm exhibit A, in terms of evidence.

Verse 2. No, just the end of verse 1. For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people, whom he foreknew.

Then he gives exhibit B. He goes back to the story in the Old Testament about Elijah, when it looked as if every single person in Israel had fallen into idolatry and paganism, and completely rejected the Lord.

[14:52] I think it's Numbers 14. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? Lord, they have killed your prophets. They have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.

But what is God's reply to Elijah? I have kept for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace.

Now just pause here for a second. I'm going to put a point up in a moment, but this is going to be really important. What's going to be constantly emphasized in this entire text is the reality of God's grace.

The surprising nature of God's grace. The unstoppable nature of God's grace. The irrevocable character of God's grace. What's constantly going to be emphasized in this is that grace is a mystery because we don't actually really understand who God is, and we keep wanting to try to make God look like ourselves, and we know that we lack grace, that we have hard hearts against certain people.

We have grace towards those we love, but not very much grace towards certain people. I'll try to show that to you later on in the sermon. And he's going to try to show you that all grace is a miracle, and that every human being who receives God's grace, there's a miracle in their lives.

[16:13] And so right here when he says there's a remnant chosen by grace, this is going to be really important. It's going to get deep in. And the rest of the imagery in the book of Romans 11 is trying to emphasize this aspect of grace.

Grace to become a Christian, grace to stay a Christian, grace to be glorified with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the new heaven and the new earth, to live in all eternity with him. In verse 6, but if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works.

Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace. Just to pause, you see, those people in the Baptist churches that I grew up in, they sort of believed, like us, that grace makes you a Christian, but after that it's your performance.

And Paul is going to say that we need to be gripped by the gospel of grace to understand that it's always grace, all the time, that we become a Christian by grace, we stay a Christian by grace, we die a Christian by grace, and grace means grace, that it's not my performance.

It never is my performance. Absolutely never. In verse 7, what then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking.

[17:38] In other words, it was seeking to be right with God, but it was seeking it not by grace, but by its accomplishments. It fell into all sorts of errors. The elect obtained it, that is, those whom God has called, but the rest were hardened.

As it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day. And David says, let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see and bend their backs forever. Now, just before we go on, we're going to keep sort of trying to get this part of it sort of in our minds. Andrew, if you could put the first point up, please.

God hardens those, God hardens those who harden themselves, but even then, God's grace through Jesus Messiah can always be the final word about me.

I don't always remember to do it, but I always try to put my points as me so that if you're writing them down, if there's something you want to think about later on, it's saying me. You know, you're saying it about yourself.

[18:43] That God hardens those who harden themselves, but even then, God's grace through Jesus Messiah can always be the final word about me. I don't say it will always be the final word about me because some people persist in unbelief right to the grave.

But what this text is going to say is that for no human being does being closed to God and rejecting God have to be the final word about you.

That it does not matter if you're sitting here this morning and you've been divorced and married and divorced seven times. It doesn't matter if you've done unbelievably horrible things.

It doesn't matter at all what your sexual orientation is. It doesn't matter anything about your heritage or your background. It doesn't matter how successful or how much of a failure you've been. That there is always the chance to receive God's grace and that from that time of receiving God's grace, God's grace will be that final word about you until you appear to God face to face.

And that's what Paul is going to try to emphasize here, that even when God judges, grace is present. You see, hardness doesn't necessarily mean that we have lots of anxiety.

[19:55] It just means closeness in a sense. I don't know how many of you have ever had this misfortune of when you go to a wedding or something like that or you go to a funeral reception, you end up having to sit down and you sit down beside people around you and you know, you're feeling a little bit of chatty mood and you're, you know, we're Canadians, we should chat at things.

So you ask the person beside you a question and they give you a grunt for an answer. Try another question, grunt. Another question, grunt. Another question, grunt.

You're thinking, gosh, normally four questions are like enough to get at least some type of a conversation going and every question there's a grunt. They're just completely closed. That's fundamentally what hardness means.

And you'll see here that in these texts it looked very daunting that actually what God does is he allows people to have what they want. Look at, he gave them a spirit of stupor.

In other words, that they're not interested. That they're sort of closed. Eyes that would not see, they don't want to see. Ears that do not, ears that would not hear, they don't want to hear.

[21:06] You know, but then even when it says a snare and a trap, a stumbling back and a red, you know, eyes darken and all that. And, you know, and then it asks in verse 11, so I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall by no means?

And just before we get in terms of the surprising way that God, you know, puts it, is that stumbling is sometimes a way to find things.

I mean, you know, just after the winter solstice, I have to wake up at six o'clock in the morning. I don't always manage it quite that early, but six o'clock, it's still dark. I don't want to wake up my wife who's sleeping beside me.

And sometimes the way I find something in my room is by stumbling over it. I mean, some of us have PhDs in what we've learned by falling over it.

You know? In other words, some of us, doesn't matter where we formerly went to university, our real university is the School of Hard Knocks. And we have PhDs from the School of Hard Knocks.

[22:08] And sometimes, Hard Knocks is the only way we find anything or learn. You see, so even in this, and then when it says here, verse 11, so I asked, did they stumble in order that they might fall?

And as I said earlier, in the Greek, it's that they fall irrevocably, that they fall and never return up.

And this is really an important question because, you see, this, if we're honest with ourselves, many of us wish this for certain people.

And so, therefore, at the back of our minds, whether we consciously express it or not, we worry that God's like this. How many people were hoping that Harper would lose, that he would fall, and that he would fall in such a way that he would never rise?

How many people are hoping that Trump will fall? And that when he falls, he will fall and be revealed as a complete and utter buffoon and he'll be mocked and he will never rise again.

How many people hope that Trudeau will have that happen to him? Or Hillary Clinton? How many people hope that? And if I haven't picked one of your four things, because really, you think, you don't follow politics at all, you have no idea who I even talked about, there's something else in your sphere of influence.

[ 23 : 19 ] Maybe you're a foodie who doesn't follow politics. And for you, it's people who eat at McDonald's. I don't know. You know, you hope that they get sick and they fall and they just keep going down, down.

You know, it's a human thing, folks. And if we're honest, there are people that we think that of. I've told this before, but you know, I came out of the counterculture.

I was like a neo-Marxist, I was very left-wing. And I remember, I really, and I was really into protest music. And when I heard that Bob Dylan became a Christian, I thought, yes, Bob Dylan became a Christian.

When I heard that Charles Colson, who was the right-hand man for Richard Nixon, that right-wing president, I said, that dirty rat, he didn't become a Christian. He's just trying to get out of being punished.

And I would have just said I was being prophetic, not revealing my hard, unfeeling heart. Colson obviously became a Christian, by the way. So Paul's asking this really, really tough question.

[ 24 : 24 ] And once again, it all goes to how we view God. Do we believe this about God? Like, let's just sort of, you know, keep going. Because part of the problem is, remember a few weeks ago we looked at how God reveals himself that he's the potter and we are the clay, and the fact of the matter is that human beings believe that we're the potter and God is the clay.

And we both love that and we're terrified by it. If we're honest with ourselves, if we think about it. We love it because we can form God the way we want. We're terrified because God ends up being exactly like us.

Verse 11. So I asked, did they, so remember, so the point here in all of this stuff is that what Paul is trying to say is the reality of grace, the constancy of grace, the fact that it's never the case.

God is not like you and me. Thanks be to God. He does not look at St. Clair. He does not look at any single person in this room. He doesn't look at Trump, Harper, Trudeau, or Clinton and say, I hope these guys fall in such a way that they just fall and fall and fall and there is no bottom to that hole.

God is never like that. Up until our final breath, his hope is that we will turn to him and receive his grace and be made right with God. Verse 11 again.

[ 25 : 43 ] So I asked, did they stumble in order that they might fall and fall and fall and fall? By no means. And this is now the surprising thing. Rather, through their trespass, salvation has come to the pagans so as to make Israel jealous.

I'm going to explain this in a moment. Now, if their trespass means riches for the world, that means, and here the world means all the people groups on the planet. And if their failure means riches for the pagans, he's basically just reiterating it to bring in the emphasis, how much more will their full inclusion mean?

Now I am speaking to you pagans inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the pagans. I magnify my ministry in order that somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous and thus save some of them.

Remember, the opening question is has God rejected his Jewish people? For if their rejection, that's not that they've been rejected by God, but their rejection of God, okay?

They've rejected God. If their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump.

[ 26 : 58 ] And if the root is holy, so are the branches. Now we just sort of want to pause here for a tiny, tiny, tiny bit of a second because there's going to be a bit of a transition here.

Just as part of this transition, many of you know that one of the problems that's going on in Canada and throughout the Western world right now is rising antisemitism. And those of you who are still

university students, you know that one of the centers of rising antisemitism is university campuses. In fact, it's the intelligentsia which is part of the source of growing antisemitism in our country and in Europe. And as well as that, we have to realize that Christians have a terrible past and history of antisemitism.

Hopefully, this text will help us to realize that not just antisemitism but all prejudice, all hatred of people groups just because of who they are is deeply unbiblical and deeply unchristian.

All of it. I mean, it's very interesting how the text was put because it says that the Jewish rejection of the gospel has led that Christians, that pagans become Christians and that every people group is to hear about Jesus.

[ 28 : 20 ] Every people group. There's to be no prejudice. Like, just because we're prejudiced doesn't mean we're not a Christian, okay? But every one of us who has some prejudice against another people group, that is deeply offensive to the Bible.

And the Bible is going to now move the image to root this, this complete rejection of antisemitism and complete rejection of all prejudice in yet more of the miracle of God's grace.

But before we do that, could you put up Romans 11 again? Because I want us to keep remembering that we're all talking about God and how he's not like us. Could you read this text with me again, please? Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. So let's keep reading from verse 17 and we'll see here how the Bible is going to give this profound image that even deeply, more deeply rejects all antisemitism and indirectly then all prejudice.

[ 29 : 44 ] Verse 17. But if some of the branches were broken off, he's talking about the olive tree, right? We'll see in a moment it's an olive tree. But if some of the branches were broken off and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches.

If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, branches were broken off so that I may be grafted in.

That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God, severity towards those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness.

Otherwise, you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in. For God has the power to graft them in a game. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree?

[ 31 : 07 ] That's a lot of different things in there. It was a long reading, but here's the, could you put up the point, Andrew, the second point? God has only one olive tree and we can only be grafted into that by a miracle of his powerful grace.

That's what he's trying to communicate here. One of the, you know, one of the, when I said that beginning of the service that some people get, hear Romans 11, get bored, others in the room, a minority, they get all excited about Romans 11.

Why? Because they can fight over it. In fact, that's one of the things that non-Christians don't like about Christians. It seems it either goes from being, they either go from talking about unbelievably boring things to wanting to fight about boring things.

And so for some Christians, they love going to Romans 11 because it gets them to talk about different things about Jewish and Israel and the place of Israel. And what we're going to see in this text is that the Bible, on one hand, condemns fully anti-Semitism, but it also completely and utterly rejects any attempt to make Israel or Jewish people into an idol.

This Bible completely and utterly rejects the idea that Jewish people don't have to come to faith in Jesus, that just by being Jewish, they will be reconciled to God.

[ 32 : 29 ] This Bible text rejects it. Olive tree is an original image of Israel and it's extended by Paul to mean all who come to be part of God's people.

And God doesn't have two olive trees, one for pagans and one for Jews. There's only one olive tree. Only one olive tree. And the other thing that this text does is it tells us that Christians, not only

evangelicals and charismatics, some of them who believe that Jewish people don't have to come to faith in Jewish because they have their own way of being made right with God, it also says that the Anglican Church of Canada, when they say that we should not pray for the salvation of Jewish people, is an error.

And it says that when the Roman Catholic Church has just recently made a statement that we aren't to pray and work for the conversion of Jewish people, the Roman Catholic Church is an error. There is one olive tree.

Could you put up the second point here? Oh yeah, it's up already. So here it is. God has only one olive tree and we can only be grafted into that by a miracle of his powerful grace. I'm terrible with gardening.

There's been a couple of times my wife has been gone for a couple of weeks and I forget to water the plants. Like I completely forget to water the plants. When I was single, my plants suffered one of two fates.

[ 33 : 57 ] They would either die of dehydration or they would die of root rot because I would water them so constantly. And very early on in our marriage, my wife learned that you never send George out to weed the garden because George hasn't the vaguest idea between the difference between a carrot growing and a weed growing or anything else.

I'm completely hopeless. So for those of us, I didn't know this until I read the commentaries on it. If you take Paul's example and you take a good healthy olive tree and you graft a wild olive branch into it, if you try to follow that to have lots of olives, you'll fail because grafting wild olive branches into a healthy olive tree creates less fruitfulness.

So what's Paul saying here? Paul is saying that he's not, Paul, this is, you see, it's not about natural processes. It's never about natural processes.

Grace on one level is never natural. It isn't that somehow or another that these natural, these pagan branches are coming in and that's going to just sort of naturally make the whole tree of all the people who are God's better.

It's grace. It's a miracle. It's not natural. It's not some natural process. Nothing's a natural process.

[ 35 : 25 ] We keep thinking there's natural processes. We look at the world and we say that person could very naturally and easily become a Christian and that person could naturally and not become a Christian and not go God's grace.

You know, look at them. Look at those earrings or look at those tattoos or look at the way they, you know, look at that. They drive gas guzzlers or look at that. They eat at McDonald's or look at that. They vote for Trump or look at that. They vote for Sanders or, you know, whatever it is.

We all have our different prejudices about what is natural and the Bible wants to keep reminding us that it's never natural. Never. It's always a miracle of grace.

And if we go around thinking, you know, the Jewish people, they'll never come to a faith. You know, that my Jewish dentist or my Jewish doctor, I actually happen to have a dentist who's Jewish and the doctor who's Jewish just by, well, maybe not coincidence, by providence.

But I, you know, you maybe think, oh, you can't share the gospel with them. You know what I mean? It's just, it's very natural. This whole image is that God's church is never natural. It's always supernatural and it's always by grace.

[ 36 : 28 ] It's always by grace. It's always a miracle. Only a miracle. That's how he works. That's how he works. If you could put up Romans 1 for us, Andrew.

You have to be careful here at the time. This is the verse for all of Romans. Can you guys read it with me, please? For I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. And I've explained before how everything in the book of Romans is sort of just trying to fill that in and help us to understand it.

And the heart of this text is that the heart of this text is that the gospel telling you about what Jesus did for us on the cross, that that is a power that comes from God.

It's God's power that makes us right with him and we receive it by believing, by putting our faith and trust in him. And that God works in a way that is right to make us right with him and it's all God.

[ 37 : 38 ] All God. Completely God. Nothing of us. All we do is receive it. We are beggars. We are a chosen people not choice people.

Chosen people not choice people. Andrew, could you put up the Romans 11 text for me right now, please? I don't know if that's in the right order. Let's just read this together again as well. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. So, God is just really, really different than us and that's really, really, really good. and nothing can stop him from showing grace. He never regrets or wants to change his mind about calling any one of you to be his child.

[ 38 : 54 ] I don't have any authority to say that myself but it's what the Bible says. Just if you look at verse 25, lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers and sisters.

A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and in this way all Israel will be saved and all Israel, by the way, doesn't mean every Jewish person, like when we think of the last time Canada was in the World Cup of Hockey or the Olympics for the gold medal, you could say all of Canada watched the game. We don't mean every Canadian watched the game, right? But you know what you mean by that and that's what you're saying that there's potentially a time when many Jewish people will come to a faith in Jesus.

Verse 26 again, in this way all Israel will be saved as it is written, the deliverer will come from Zion and he will banish ungodliness from Jacob and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.

As regards the gospel they are enemies for your sake, that's temporarily, but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.

[ 40 : 00 ] Could you put up the next point, Andrew, please? God's call God's call is irrevocable but it is not unconditional.

God's call is irrevocable but it is not unconditional. What Paul is saying here is this and this word irrevocable is a very, very, very good word but underneath it there's a deeper type of image that makes it even more wonderful because one of the things that we regularly have as people is maybe we offer to, I don't know, maybe we offer to lend somebody money or we lend somebody clothes and then afterwards we regret it and then we want to renege on our deal we want it back and what Paul is saying here is that God never regrets calling a person to be his own and he never takes it back.

It's irrevocable. It's irrevocable. Some of you might say George that all sounds very good but wasn't there earlier this part about if you don't stay and you don't stay in faith you're going to lose your faith.

Wasn't that somewhere earlier and I just noticed that you kept reading and reading and reading but that jumped out at me George. That jumped out at me at this idea that isn't that really more the experience that you can have a faith in Jesus and all that but then later on you just get over it and then it's all over and it doesn't seem as if it's irrevocable.

Isn't that what the Bible just said a few minutes ago? Let's look at it in closing. It was earlier on in verses 19 to 23. It goes like this then you will say branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.

[ 41 : 44 ] That is true they were broken off because of their unbelief but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud but fear for if God did not spare the natural branches neither will he spare you.

Note then the kindness and the severity of God severity towards those who have fallen but God's kindness to you provided you continue in his kindness otherwise you too will be cut off and even if they even if and even they if they do not continue in their unbelief will be grafted in for God has the power to graft them in a game.

Here's the thing this text is not talking about people being who come to faith in Jesus being cut off by God. Andrew if you could put up the next point true faith in Jesus has several counterfeits one of which is presumption.

This text isn't talking about how God is going to cut people off who don't perform well this text is talking about how God eventually reveals counterfeit faith.

Counterfeit faith. And there's different types of counterfeit faith but the one which Paul is talking about here is presumption. Andrew if you could put up the next point please.

[ 43 : 05 ] God wants me to die to presumption and deepen in gospel faith. He wants me to die to arrogance and deepen in gospel assurance. God wants me to die to presumption and deepen in gospel faith.

He wants me to die to arrogance and deepen in gospel assurance. See the fundamental human problem is that we want to be like God. And so for some of us when we hear this offer of the gospel that God will make us right with himself and that nothing can then separate us from the love of God that we are guaranteed that we will be with God forever.

For some people all they do is just take that that they've got. It's not a conscious thing but that they've got God by the shortened Harry's that they figured out a way around God and they hear that and they say wow that's fantastic I don't have God's going to make me go to heaven no matter what I do.

I've got to get out of jail free card and it just leads to a type of laziness and complete and utter indifference and it leads to a type of pride and arrogance and at the very very center of it we start to think that we're not it's not that God chose us but that there's something choice about us but true faith has come to the point in time when they recognize that all of my life maybe those of you who've been growing up in Muslim backgrounds or Orthodox Jewish backgrounds or just households where there's lots of a type of moralism and lots of rules and where the parents love seems to be conditional upon performance and it just seems as if our whole life is trying to be about performance and about performance and about performance and God wants us to come to the point in time where we realize that it's not about our performance it's never about our performance we can never perform enough that's the bad news but the good news is that God because he loves you he sent his son to die upon the cross and he will do everything to make you right and that when God takes you when he takes your hand in his when he takes you into his life when he enters into your life your hand is weak your performance will falter there will come times you can't perform at all you will do the opposite of performance you will do terrible things but God will never let you go and he wants us to have an assurance that he will never let you go if I do a terrible job in this church and in two years there's only three people left in the congregation he will never let me go if all of a sudden something happens and we're doing five services a day and the place is packed out and there's two thousand on a Sunday it doesn't make any difference to whether God loves me or not not about my performance

God will never let me go and when we've been gripped when we've been broken if you notice in all of those images of the olive tree the only way you get on the olive tree is if you're broken and grafted in and for some of us when we realize that it's all about what God does for us it frees us up to no longer have to be all about our performance it frees us up to look at why we aren't talking to our parents or what there is in our past or our hardness of heart or how we project on God it frees us up to say you know what maybe I'm going to share the gospel with my Jewish friend because you know what God says Jewish people are going to keep becoming Christians or you know what maybe that person that's really really really different from me I don't know they go to McDonald's or they have you know things that look like they're about you know this big in their ears or they have lots of tattoos or they have no tattoos whatever it is your culture crossing your culture maybe I'll share the gospel with them why because I don't know who God I can try it that grace frees us up that our lives start to be changed out of gratitude not out of any sense of accomplishment and that our gratitude we can look within we can give up self-defensiveness we can give up trying to justify ourselves we can give up trying to make ourselves righteous we can live in gratitude and be live and ground in gratitude and live out of promise and we can try and we can fail and we can know that nothing will take us out of God's hands

[ 47 : 24 ] God wants us to have assurance not arrogance he wants us to have faith not presumption and God even when he starts to reveal the depth of our presumption and arrogance it's only so we can call out to him and receive his grace even if we have lived a life of profound presumption religious arrogant presumption he wants you to stumble over it so you know grace please stand you know our big text is oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgment and how inscrutable his ways for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever amen

I mean do you know the God who is there because the God who is there has revealed himself that he sent his son to die upon the cross he who is rich became poor so you could become rich and the God who is there he has said that he will act in a way that is wise it's not our human wisdom it's his human wisdom it's his God wisdom that means that Jesus is the means by which we are reconciled to God and God knew every single thing there is to know about you and he's revealed that he knows everything about you but he doesn't turn back on you and doesn't reject you he died he sent his son to die on the cross knowing everything there is to know about you and still he loved you and still he died on the cross so you could be his and when Jesus dies on the cross he dies on the cross it's an unbelievable gift of riches we can never repay him we can never put him in our debt and this is just how God is we can never put him in our debt absolutely never no amount of religious accomplishment spiritual accomplishment victimhood ever puts him in our debt ever all he does is give this is the God who does exist do you know him do you know him are you willing to have your minds purged by scripture as you reflect upon

Jesus on the cross there is no better time than this to call out to God that you would be a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel of grace learning to live for his glory let's pray father we thank you just to hear the sound of children laughing in the background and father we give you thanks and praise that you laugh and have joy over us you don't laugh at us stumbling or falling you don't want us to fall irrevocably and never get up that you just always offer grace always offer grace so father we thank you that we do not have to have a really strong hand in a life of profound religious performance but that when we put our hands in your hands that you never let us go you never let us go it's all about your power not about ours father we thank you for this father we ask that your holy spirit would move in our lives to make us disciples of Jesus gripped by this gospel of grace learning to live for your glory that you would help us father to die to presumption and die to arrogance but to rest in assurance of grace and your unfailing character goodness and mercy and this we ask in Jesus' name  
Amen